M/H SNIE 10-12-65

Probable Communist Reactions to a US Course of Action

16 December 1965

~~S-E-C-R-E-T~~

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

(b)(3)

16 December 1965

MEMORANDUM TO HOLDERS OF SNIE 10-12-65

SUBJECT: SNIE 10-12-65: PROBABLE COMMUNIST REACTIONS TO A US COURSE OF ACTION

Attached are Annexes A and B to SNIE 10-12-65. They should be attached to the published estimate, dated 10 December 1965.

[redacted]

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Executive Officer
National Estimates

[redacted]

DISTRIBUTION A

~~S-E-C-R-E-T~~

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

16 December 1965

SUBJECT: SNIE 10-12-65: PROBABLE COMMUNIST REACTIONS TO A US COURSE OF ACTION

ANNEX A: PAVN INFILTRATION CAPABILITIES DURING 1966

1. Current PAVN Strength in South Vietnam. Regular PAVN combat units began to move into South Vietnam late in 1964. As of 15 November 1965, there were an estimated nine PAVN regiments in South Vietnam -- seven confirmed, one probable, and one possible. Each regiment is comprised of three battalions of infantry, estimated to average 500 men each.1/ One regiment may have brought in some 120-mm mortars.

2. Reinforcement Capabilities. On the basis of an estimated total population of nearly 18 million, North Vietnam's manpower is calculated to be about 4,150,000 in the 15-49 age group. Domestic labor requirements absorb an estimated 2,400,000 men of this group. The labor force

1/ We carry PAVN units deployed to South Vietnam at strengths considerably below the full estimated T/O strength of units in North Vietnam.

required to repair damaged LOCs is estimated at 50-100,000,[2] of whom about one-half are probably members of paramilitary groups and the remainder local civilians. Probably an additional 175,000 men reach the age of 15 each year; 60 percent of this figure would add 100,000 to those fit for military duty.

3. In VC-dominated areas of South Vietnam, where they are presumably subject to VC recruiting, there are probably about 430,000 physically fit males age 15-49.

4. DRV military forces are estimated at 297,000 men: 265,000 in the regular army; 27,000 in the armed security forces; 2,500 in the air force; and 2,500 in the navy. In addition, there is a militia of perhaps 200,000 men who are armed with rifles and light machine guns and have had some military training. There may be a further 1,800,000 men and women with some rudiments of military training.[3]

5. To meet security requirements as they now probably see them, the DRV leaders probably wish to retain at home all the security force, air force, and navy -- a total of 32,000 men -- and an estimated 183,000 army troops allocated as follows: 38,000 for air defense, 70,000 in support

[2] Based upon an assumed ratio of 30-60 laborers per mile.
[3] Under conditions of total mobilization, DRV military forces could probably expand to about 475,000 within six months.

roles; four infantry divisions (50,000), two infantry brigades (10,000), one artillery division (14,500), and one armored regiment (1,000). On this basis, a balance of some 82,000 men -- ground troops -- would be available for deployment out of the country. It is estimated that about 15,000 of this number are already in South Vietnam and 9,000 in Laos. The number of PAVN troops available for service in GVN could be increased if their place in the DRV was taken by Chinese troops.4/

6. There are an estimated 38 infantry regiments in the North Vietnamese army, of which 15 would probably be reserved for home defense. Of the remainder, about half could be used to train new units and replacements for infiltration to South Vietnam. With a force of this size available to furnish instruction and training, about 36 new PAVN regiments or regimental equivalents of approximately 1,500 men each could be trained and infiltrated into South Vietnam during 1966. This would amount to an average of 9 battalion equivalents a month.

4/ Our estimates concerning the allocation of DRV military forces among the various missions set forth in paragraphs 5 and 6 are based to a considerable extent on our judgment of what would be probable and reasonable rather than on any large body of evidence as to actual DRV practice.

7. Within South Vietnam, VC/PAVN forces are currently estimated at 110 combat battalions,[5] including 27 PAVN battalions. The VC are believed capable of recruiting and training two new battalions plus 2,500 replacements per month during 1966.

8. In sum, therefore, we estimate that VC/PAVN forces in South Vietnam could receive reinforcements at a rate of 16 battalion equivalents per month during 1966.

9. VC/PAVN combat losses are estimated at the rate of some 15,000 men (30 battalion equivalents) for each of the last two quarters of 1965. Assuming further US buildup and an increased level of combat in 1966, this loss rate could rise by as much as four or five battalion equivalents each quarter. Based on this figure and the estimated VC/PAVN input capability, VC/PAVN strength by the end of 1966 could be in the neighborhood of 155 battalions. However, the strength of this force -- and its effectiveness -- could be greatly altered in either direction by such factors as the introduction of new weapons, battlefield innovations, and major changes in tactics or strategy.

5/ There are also about 13,000 VC in separate companies and platoons in the local forces, 18,000 combat support troops, 40,000 in political/military cadres and 100,000 - 120,000 guerrillas in the VC structure in South Vietnam. Only the 110 battalions of the main force are believed to receive significant support from external sources, therefore, the logistical requirements discussed in this estimate consider only the requirements of the VC/PAVN main force battalions.

10. Logistical Requirements. The buildup of VC forces and, particularly the introduction of additional PAVN troops into South Vietnam, will increase Communist logistical support requirements. We do not consider in this estimate the logistical requirements needed to maintain the infiltration and logistic operations through the Lao corridor. We estimate that the VC/PAVN forces in South Vietnam have only a minimum and irregular requirement for external logistical support for Class I (food) and Class III (POL) supplies. They do, however, have a continuing requirement for external logistic support for some types of Class II (quartermaster), Class IV (weapons) and Class V (ammunition) supplies. If each of the 110 battalions currently estimated to be in South Vietnam continues to be engaged in combat at the levels of most of 1965 (about once in every 35 days) and expends one-third of the basic load of ammunition each day of combat, the total daily external logistic requirement for this entire force would be about 12 tons per day.

11. If the war in Vietnam escalates to a level where each battalion is engaged in combat once in 7 days, the external logistical support requirement for 110 battalions would be over 70 tons per day.

12. A buildup of VC/PAVN forces to 155 battalions by the end of 1966 would bring about a substantial increase in their dependence on external sources for logistical support, and almost certainly in the scale of combat as well. If these 155 battalions were to engage in combat on a scale of once in every 3 days we would then estimate their external logistical requirement to be at least 165 tons daily.

13. The requirements estimated in the previous two paragraphs would be increased by the extent to which the VC/PAVN forces would lose their ability at these levels of combat to obtain their supplies, particularly food, from within South Vietnam.

14. Logistical Capability. The cumulative throughput capability into South Vietnam by means of the Lao corridor is estimated for the current dry season at 150 to 200 tons daily. This capacity would be in excess of the requirements of the current 110-battalion main force, even under the conditions of increased combat described in paragraph 11. To meet these requirements, the Communists would have to make maximum use of the routes through Laos during the dry season (December - May) and to stockpile, maintain, and distribute materiel at the southern end with maximum efficiency. Seasonal restrictions would make it extremely difficult to meet the requirements of a force of 155 battalions under the conditions of paragraph 12. In such a case, the Communists, to sustain their military operations, would have to increase the capacity and utilization of the Lao corridor, introduce substantial supplies by sea, and/or further exploit the routes through Cambodia. We stress that all the foregoing discusses capabilities in the absence of intensified interdiction efforts.

ANNEX B: THE POTENTIAL FOR USE OF SEA SHIPMENT TO CAMBODIA AS A COMMUNIST SUPPLY ROUTE TO SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Political Factors. Cambodia's ruler, Prince Sihanouk, has frequently adopted strongly anti-US attitudes, and he appears to believe that communism will triumph in South Vietnam. Though it cannot be established that Sihanouk personally acquiesced or had knowledge, it is a fact that Cambodian territory has been covertly used to provide transit and sanctuary for the VC. Indeed, the northeast tip of Cambodia, where Phnom Penh has never exercised real control, is a major Vietnamese Communist base area, and on Hanoi's maps this territory is shown as a part of Vietnam.1/

2. The use of the country's only significant seaport, Sihanoukville, as a point of entry for large amounts of military materiel to be moved onward to the VC in South Vietnam or stockpiled for their future use would be a very different matter. We believe that Sihanouk would feel that such flagrant cooperation with the Vietnamese insurgency would carry an extremely high risk of bringing Cambodia into the war. He would fear interdiction of his ports and other transportation facilities and, possibly, US/GVN invasion. For these reasons, Sihanouk would almost certainly not agree to such an arrangement, at least as long as the US/GVN retain anything like their present capabilities for war in the Indochina area.

1/ For a discussion of current use of Cambodian territory in support of VC activities in South Vietnam, see USIB-D-24.7/4A entitled "Infiltration and Logistics - South Vietnam."

3. Over the past few years, in fact, Sihanouk has shown himself to be quite sensitive about the use of his country by the Communists for actions against South Vietnam. There have been a number of minor clashes between Cambodian troops and VC, when the latter seemed to be operating too freely in Cambodia. As recently as 7 December, Sihanouk requested the ICC to consider placing a strict control on Sihanoukville and publishing the results of its observations.

4. Capabilities. If, contrary to our estimate, Sihanouk opened his territory to a major logistic effort, the amount of materiel reaching the Communists in South Vietnam could be substantial. In calendar 1964, the port of Sihanoukville handled some 800,000 tons, of which 220,000 were imports. The port could handle additional imports of about 450,000 tons per year, an average of about 1,200 tons daily. This figure could be increased by intensified operation. There are two roads which could be used to clear Sihanoukville.[2/] These are (1) the Sihanoukville-Phnom Penh American Friendship highway and (2) the coastal route direct to South Vietnam. It should be noted that the use of these routes would have its direct impact almost wholly in the southern part of South Vietnam, particularly in the Mekong delta region.

2/ A railroad from Phnom Penh to Sihanoukville has been under construction for about five years, but a number of major bridges and most of the track-laying on the 160-mile route remain to be completed.

5. The Sihanoukville-Phnom Penh highway has a capacity of 8,150 tons a day in the dry season and 7,350 tons a day in the rainy season. From Phnom Penh, goods could be moved by either highway or inland waterway to the South Vietnamese border. Three highways lead from Phnom Penh to South Vietnam; the most important is Route 1, which leads to the area facing Tay Ninh province and has a capacity of 4,200 tons a day in the dry season and 1,800 tons a day in the rainy season. The major inland waterway is the Mekong River system, which has a capacity, with craft readily available, to move at least 6,000 tons per day south to the border. This capacity could be increased during the high-water season. Supplies could also be moved north on the Mekong to Stung Treng and thence by poor roads and trails or minor waterways to VC/PAVN forces in Kontum and Pleiku provinces, but this is a difficult route and has less capacity than the Lao corridor.

6. The coastal road from Sihanoukville has a dry-weather capacity of over 1,000 tons per day and is the shortest route: about 115 miles. In the rainy season, however, its capacity drops to 150 tons a day.

7. Except for Route 1, the GVN has check points at the border crossings of each of the major routes, so goods would have to be dispersed at some point short of the border and moved on local roads, trails, and waterways. On Route 1, however, the border crossing point apparently is under Viet Cong control, the nearest known Vietnamese military units being located about 15 miles to the northeast.

8. Thus, in the absence of efforts to interdict and assuming sufficient trucks and drivers were made available, the total volume of materiel which could be cleared through the port of Sihanoukville could be moved forward to South Vietnam over the main routes. In addition, supplies brought in through lesser ports along the Gulf of Siam could be moved by coastal and inland water routes and over trails.